Comox Valley 2025 Point-in-Time Homelessness Count: Key Findings and Community Insights

Link to Count: [Comox Valley Point-in-Time Count 2025]

This document provides a summary of key learnings from the 2025 Point in Time Homelessness Count in the Comox Valley and connects the numbers to broader community changes. This year's findings reflect both progress and growing challenges — showing that homelessness in our region is local, persistent, and rooted in systemic inequities.

Most people experiencing homelessness are long-term residents of the Comox Valley facing barriers such as disability, aging, income insecurity, and the ongoing impacts of colonization. Indigenous peoples remain highly overrepresented, and youth and 2SLGBTQ+ community members continue to face unique and significant barriers to safe and stable housing.

Comparing 2023 and 2025 data reveals two important realities: investments in affordable housing and community support programs *do* make a measurable difference, but the number of people experiencing homelessness for the first time is increasing. This highlights the need for ongoing dedication to homelessness prevention programs and a full spectrum of housing options — from shelters to supportive to transitional and affordable housing — along with comprehensive services supporting health, stability, and well-being.

Homelessness is not inevitable. With collaboration, compassion, and accessibility, this crisis can be addressed. Meaningful progress requires leadership and coordinated action across multiple sectors, including First Nation, federal, provincial, municipal, and regional governments, as well as non-profit and charitable organizations, and entire communities. Equally essential is the inclusion of people with lived and living experience, alongside trauma-informed and culturally safe supports.

What is a Point-in-Time (PiT) Count?

A Point-in-Time (PiT) Count is a community-led survey capturing a snapshot of people experiencing homelessness over a single 24-hour period. It identifies who is experiencing homelessness, where they are staying, and which services they are connected to, helping guide local support and planning. This data collection is done regularly across Canada to build local and national understanding of change and shifting needs.

PiT Counts Collects Information On:

- The number of people experiencing homelessness, including those in shelters and those experiencing hidden or less visible homelessness.
- Demographic details (Age, gender, Indigenous identity, sexual orientation, disability, and other social and cultural factors)
- Income sources and access to services
- Pathways into homelessness (reasons for losing housing or instability)

Limitations

The count cannot capture everyone. People who are harder to reach—such as women and children, youth, or those couch-surfing or living in vehicles—are often not counted. The PiT Count identifies a **minimum number of people experiencing homelessness**, not the full picture.

Key Findings from the Comox Valley 2025 PiT Count

- **Total Count:** 218 individuals; 137 unsheltered (in tents, vehicles, public spaces, or staying temporarily with others)
- **Decrease in total number of people counted from 2023 PiT Count:** Total count dropped from 272 (177 sheltered, 95 unsheltered) to 218 in 2025.
- **Increase in the total number of unsheltered people:** The total number of people experiencing homelessness with no shelter increased from 95 to 137, an increase of 144%.
- **Indigenous people are over-represented:** 30% of respondents identified as Indigenous, compared with 7% of BC's overall population. Furthermore, 23% of Indigenous respondents were under the age of 25, and more than half (53%) were homeless for the first time as a youth.
- **Seniors continue to experience homelessness:** 20% of people counted are aged 55+, many facing first-time homelessness later in life

- **The 2SLGBTQ+ community is over-represented:** 16%, up from 12% in 2023
- **Duration of Homelessness:** 76% of people counted had been experiencing homelessness for 1 year or more.
- **People experiencing homelessness are from the Comox Valley.**
    - 30% of people experiencing homelessness have always lived here.
    - The majority (71%) of people who are homeless in the Comox Valley have lived here for 5 or more years.
- **Causes of Housing Loss:** 41% insufficient income, substance use challenges (27%), 24% mental health challenges (24%), 30% eviction (new in 2025)
- **The majority of people experiencing homelessness live with Disabilities & Health Challenges:** More than 83% of people experiencing homelessness live with disabilities or health challenges: The top six are Physical disabilities (39%), cognitive disabilities (38%), acquired brain injuries (28%), chronic medical conditions (49%), mental health challenges (83%), and substance use and recovery needs (72%).

Sheltered vs. Unsheltered

- **2025:** 137 individuals unsheltered (~22% of those unsheltered were couch-surfing or temporarily staying with others)
- **2023:** 95 individuals unsheltered
    - An increase of 144% in unsheltered individuals counted between 2023 and 2025.
- Changes partly reflect post-COVID shifts in local sheltering options and the completion of new housing units.

Length of Residency and Duration of Homelessness

Homelessness in the Comox Valley is **local and long-standing, not transient**. These are community members with deep roots who have lost housing and have not yet been able to regain stability.

- 86% had lived in the Comox Valley for at least a year.
- 31% had always lived in the region.
- 71% had been homeless for five years or more.

Causes of Housing Loss

The leading cause of losing housing was insufficient income. Eighty-two (82%) of respondents report that they are on income assistance. The allowable ‘shelter’ payment from the Ministry of

Social Development for Income Assistance is set at $500 per month for a single person, up to a maximum of $1,040 for a family of eight.

- 41% — Insufficient income
- 30% — Eviction (new question added in 2025)
- 27% — Substance use challenges
- 24% — Mental health challenges

Youth, Gender, and 2SLGBTQ+ Representation

Youth and people who are part of the 2SLGBTQ+ community are experiencing unique risks and challenges. Being in foster care continues to be a risk factor for homelessness.

- 16% identified as 2SLGBTQ+, up from 12% in 2023.
- 38% of all respondents first experienced homelessness as youth, rising to 53% among Indigenous respondents.
- 28% of all respondents were in foster care as a youth, rising to 46% of Indigenous respondents.
- Youth and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals face specific barriers to housing stability and well-being and need targeted, identity-affirming supports — from prevention programs in child welfare and education to inclusive and safe housing models.

Comments from the Coalition on the 2025 PiT Results

- Lower numbers in 2025 may reflect the ability of volunteers to conduct the count because of factors like outreach capacity and timing, weather, or an increase in hidden homelessness.
- Agencies that work directly with people who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness report that they are witnessing **ongoing complexity**, especially among seniors and those with co-occurring health issues.
- The **underrepresentation of 'acquired brain injury' in the 2025 Count** data reminds us of the importance of community knowledge and service-provider insight in painting a more accurate picture.
- Community partners and front-line workers report that the actual number of **seniors experiencing homelessness** appears to be **higher than reflected in the PiT Count**, noting a consistent need for shelter, complex care and housing support among older adults.

Housing Investments and Their Impact on the Comox Valley

Three housing projects have helped transition people from shelters to housing.

- **Temporary Hotel Sheltering:** During the pandemic (2023 count), temporary hotel accommodations (e.g., The Travelodge) increased shelter capacity.
- **The Lodge** has now transitioned to permanent supportive housing (64 units), which means those units are housing and not shelter. This means that those 64 individuals would have been counted as sheltered homeless in the 2023 PiT count, and are now not counted. The Lodge offers supportive transitional housing with 24/7 staff, life skills training, and connections to community services to help people move from homelessness to independent living.

Three new affordable housing developments have been completed.

- **Cypress Gardens (52 units), Mission Ridge (88 units), Naut'sa mawt (34 units):** Housing for seniors, people with disabilities, women, women with children fleeing violence, single-parent families, other singles, and Indigenous elders. (*Note: Darry's Place provides 40 transitional units for women and children fleeing violence within Mission Ridge; the remaining 48 Mission Ridge units are affordable for all genders and ages, with or without children.*)
- **Outcome:** Investments in accessible, supportive, and culturally safe housing have contributed to the decline in homelessness in the Comox Valley.

Core Areas for Continued Focus

To create lasting change, we must continue to take a **whole-community, equity-driven approach** that addresses both the immediate and root causes of homelessness.

- **Build and Maintain Culturally Safe, Accessible, and Age-Friendly Housing**
    - Expand housing that meets diverse needs — including seniors, people with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, and 2SLGBTQ+ community members.
    - Prioritize universal design and accessibility standards in all new builds and renovations.
    - Support Indigenous-led housing initiatives and co-governance models that uphold the principles of UNDRIP.
- **Prevent Evictions and Strengthen Early Intervention**

    - Establish proactive eviction-prevention programs and tenant outreach supports.
- **Expand Indigenous-Led and Inclusive Programs**
    - Resource and empower Indigenous organizations to lead solutions grounded in culture, ceremony, and community-defined healing.
    - Build cross-sector partnerships that embed Indigenous perspectives and leadership in homelessness prevention, service delivery, and data collection.
    - Promote culturally safe engagement practices across all systems.
- **Strengthen Disability-, Health-, and Brain-Injury-Informed Supports**
    - Recognize the intersection of disability, health, and housing stability.
    - Integrate accessible health care, mental health, and harm reduction within housing and outreach models.
    - Advocate for sustainable funding for brain injury supports, cognitive rehabilitation, and case management.
- **Maintain Trauma-Informed and Harm-Reduction Frameworks**
    - Continue to meet people where they are, ensuring services are low-barrier, person-centered, and non-punitive.
    - Expand harm reduction and peer-led outreach services, including drug checking, safe consumption spaces, and mobile supports.
    - Promote training for all service providers in trauma-informed and culturally safe care.
- **Advance Equity, Inclusion, and Anti-Discrimination**
    - Address systemic inequities faced by Indigenous peoples, women, 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, newcomers, and racialized community members.
    - Embed diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) principles in governance, funding, and hiring practices.
    - Create safe spaces for feedback and leadership from people with lived and living experience.
- **Build Community Awareness and Compassion**
    - Counter stigma and misinformation about homelessness and poverty through public education and storytelling.
    - Foster shared understanding that homelessness is not an individual failure, but a result of structural gaps.
    - Encourage a culture of empathy and advocacy within the broader community.
- **Strengthen Coordination Across Systems**
    - Enhance data sharing and service coordination among health, housing, justice, and social service sectors.
    - Develop integrated case management for individuals with complex needs.

- Support capacity building within the non-profit sector to sustain this work collaboratively.

Community Reflection: A Shared Responsibility

The 2025 Count reminds us that behind every data point is a neighbour, friend, or family member whose life has been shaped by housing insecurity. While this data can show us the scope of the issue and potential progress made, real change happens when communities come together with compassion to understand, respond, and act with care.

Across the Comox Valley, service providers, local governments, First Nations, Indigenous partners, healthcare workers, and residents are working tirelessly to respond to this crisis — but we cannot do it alone. Sustainable change will require shared responsibility, coordinated action, and a steadfast commitment to equity and inclusion in every decision we make.

With understanding, care, and coordinated effort, the Comox Valley can make sure housing is accessible to everyone in need.